Movies & TV

Studio Ghibli vs. Disney: The Key Animation Differences Explained

Two animation studios with two very different points of view.

By Jason Hellerman
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'Spirited Away' | 'The Beauty and the Beast' Credit: Studio Ghibli | Disney

Animation is one of the most fun mediums in filmmaking because it feels like anything is possible. But not all animation is made the same or has the same philosophies behind it. It's a way to make something, not a monolith.

That's how you can have two huge companies like Disney and Studio Ghibli, which are paragons in the field, and yet be so different.

While both create breathtaking worlds, their approaches to design and storytelling are worlds apart.

In this fascinating breakdown by the Pomeroy Art Academy, we dive into the artistic nuances that make Hayao Miyazaki's work feel so distinct from the classic Disney style.

Let's dive in.

What Studio Ghibli Does That Disney Doesn't
Pomeroy Art Academy

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Before We Get Started...

I doubt you'd find a kid in America who was not shaped in some way by a Disney movie, and the lucky ones will feel the same way about Studio Ghibli.

This is not an argument over who is better, but a case study in why they do things in their own way. Hopefully, a celebration of each.

Shape vs. Texture

One of the most immediate differences lies in how characters are built. Disney is famously shape-oriented. And Pixar famously has thicc moms, but that's a different post.

Characters like Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* are designed with a "formula" in mind. They made them specific, with clean silhouettes and proportions that make it easy for animators to understand how a character turns in space.

But in contrast, Miyazaki and Ghibli favor texture and rhythm.

When looking at Kiki from *Kiki's Delivery Service*, you'll notice her hair isn't just a mass; it has a spiral pattern and broken strands that give it a sense of movement and "autonomy". These characters often feel more grounded in a "graphic universe" where the texture of the hair, clothes, and props all speak the same language.

'Beauty and the Beast' CREDIT: Buena Vista Pictures Distribution

The Eyes

Disney eyes are "fully sculpted" and "fully linear," meaning every part of the eye is clearly defined to give the character depth. They are human, wide, and expressive.

But again, we see Ghibli often does the opposite.

Miyazaki takes a more minimalist approach. He uses flesh tones and white space to *suggest* the shape of an eye rather than drawing it explicitly. This subtle touch creates a softer look.

The video thinks it can be more emotive, but I don't totally agree. I do think it has to do with the situations of characters and that each place draws eyes to fit the kinds of narratives. Disney has more fairy tale eyes that emote in different ways.

'Spirited Away' Credit: Studio Ghibli

Realistic Gestures and "Ghibli Shadows"

Okay, so I think a lot of this boils down to Disney trying to find consistency in the animation and Ghibli being okay with differences that are emotive.

Take the hands, for instance.

Disney hands follow a basic block shape, but Miyazaki leans into unique gestures. He focuses on the way fingers are placed in ways that haven't been done in Western animation before.

Another big difference is that Ghibli uses contour shading to add depth in certain scenes, where a Disney character's hand might be a single flat color, to match the skin tone of the characters all over.

'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' Credit: Disney

Embracing the "Grody" and the Old

Okay, so the video makes this case I'll present here, where they reimagine the Beast from *Beauty and the Beast* in a Ghibli style.

The idea is that Ghibli isn't afraid of imperfections. While Glenn Keane's Disney Beast is a "beautiful design," a Ghibli version might include some asymmetry: Like a single snaggletooth or Warts, wrinkles, and "grody bags" under the eyes, similar to Yubaba from *Spirited Away*.

This is a cool way to think of it, but it also makes the beast so ugly I could see Disney balking at making toys of him or putting him on lunch boxes, Not to mentio nand audience being upset Belle makes out with him.

But that could just be my Western mind wandering.

'Spirited Away'Credit: Studio Ghibli

Summing It All Up

As I said up top, I think the differences are interesting. But I also think you can like movies from both and that there is no right or wrong way to do this stuff.

You may like some of the whimsy from Ghibli, but also like the commercial narratives and songs that Disney bakes into tidy stories.

What will be interesting to me is how the next crop of filmmakers raised on both will have animations that incorporate everything you've seen here.

Let me know what you think in the comments.

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Disney, Animation, Studio Ghibli, Studio Ghibli

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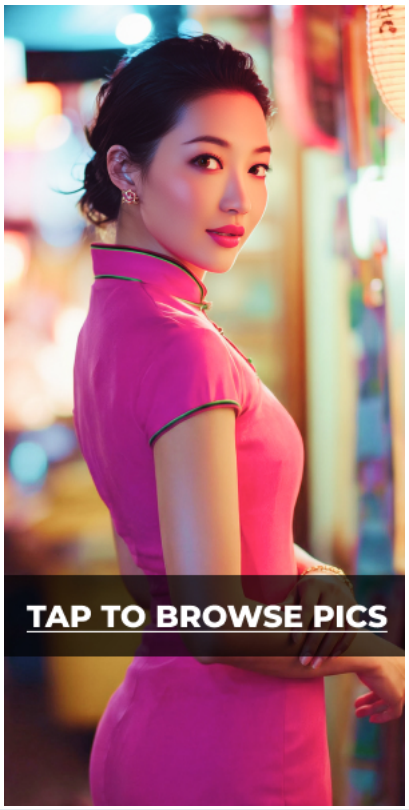

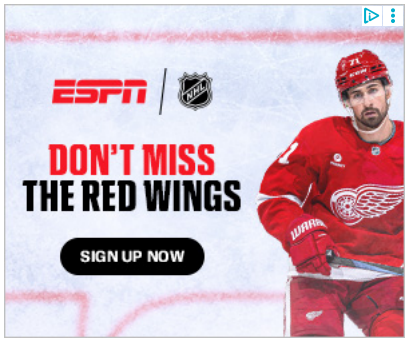

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What movies are on the expanded list?

By Jason Hellerman

Feb 25, 2026

I love my Letterboxd app so much, I am constantly on there writing about the movies I have seen and tracking my journey through film and television.

One of the coolest things the app does is track movies and their ratings. And it's constantly updating the standings as titles rise and fall.

Well, Letterboxd just announced that they have now compiled a list of the top 500 movies rated on their app.

So as of February 23, 2026, that has gone live. The list was curated by Dave Vis, extracted from here. It ranks narrative feature films by average member rating.

Let's dive in.

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The 25 Best Movie Monologues

Watching actors chew up the screen can be so inspiring.

By Jason Hellerman

Feb 25, 2026

As a writer, I'm always hoping to put words on the page that can live forever. Of course, filmmaking is a collaborative experience, so you need a director to take the scene and mold it, and then great actors to embody the characters and deliver the message.

The best movie monologues have everything working for them, with this collaboration working on every front.

That's why so many actors choose to try to replicate them in auditions and on their reels. But what are the best movie monologues in my opinion? Today, we're going to dig into that list and see what we come up with.

Let's dive in.

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